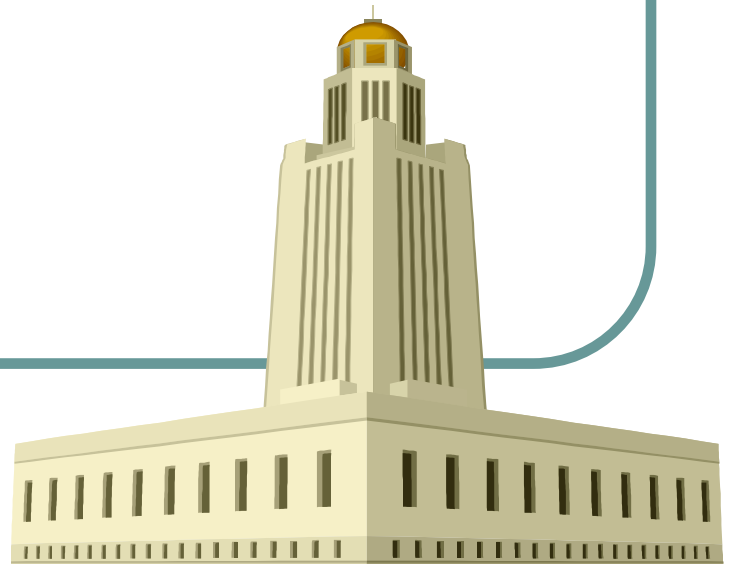


Communicating with the United States Congress & the Nebraska Legislature

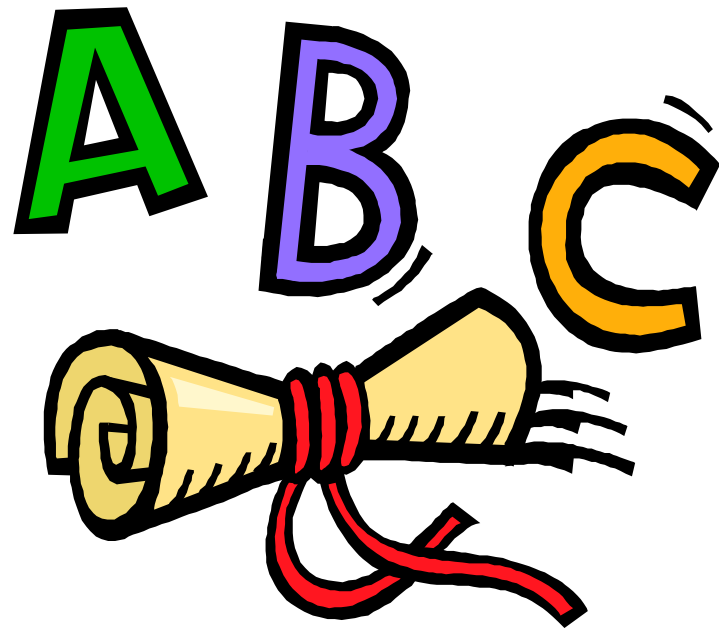


ABCs of Successful Advocacy

Be **A**ccurate

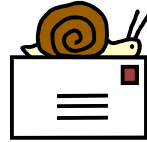
Be **B**rief

Be **C**redible



Communicating ...

- The old way



- Personal handwritten letters were the most effective means of communication with a Member of Congress in Washington, or to your State Senator in Lincoln



- The new way



- After 9/11, if you produce a letter to a Member of Congress, it is better to fax or email. “Snail mail” may take up to two months to be delivered!
- Personal handwritten letters are still an acceptable method of communicating with State Senators, but most respond quickly to emails.

Contacts with Congress



How can you locate your legislators?

- <http://vote-smart.org/>
 - This website will locate your federal senators and representatives, as well as the Governor and your State Senator
 - Enter your zip code + 4

What to write?

- Mirror the effective elements of a letter in your fax or email.
- Make sure it is addressed properly.
- Make sure it is clear that the communication is from a constituent.
 - Include your home address and phone number
- Personalize it (not just a form letter).

Why does it need to be personal?

- Why the preference for personalized communications?
 - Puts a face on the issue
 - Real stories about real people
 - Requests/concerns come from constituents



Email

- Identify the bill or the issue in the subject line
- Include your name, title, organization and address at the bottom of the message
- Text can be written like a letter.
- Keep it short.
- Check the spelling!
- Always end by saying “thank you”!

How to send an email to Members of Congress

- House:
 - www.house.gov
 - Click on "Write your Representative"
 - Follow directions.
- Senate:
 - www.senate.gov
 - Click on "Senators"
 - Find your Senator (will have an email address listed)
 - click on email
 - type your message

How effective is this in Congress?

Members of Congress seldom read their own email.

- If possible, send the email to the staff person who handles your issue
- Email addresses are consistent:
 - House –
 - FirstName.LastName @mail.house.gov
 - jane.doe@mail.house.gov
 - Senate –
 - FirstName_LastName@Senator's Last Name.Senate.gov
 - john_doe@smith.senate.gov

Essential to develop relationships with staff

- When they know you, responses are quicker
- They know you and your issues
- It's a two-way street – offer to serve as a policy resource for them
- Continually thank them for their support

Washington vs. District Meetings

- You can sometimes be more effective and successful in cultivating relationships with Congressional staff at the district level
- More accessible/fewer distractions
- More likely to meet with the legislator

Correspondence

- 1st paragraph –
 - explain who you are and why you're writing (attention/interest).
- 2nd paragraph –
 - explain the issue and why it affects you (describe)
 - Tell a story
 - How does the issue help/hurt you?
- 3rd paragraph –
 - ask for support or opposition (action).
- Conclusion
 - brief summary, and say “thank you”

Phone Calls to Congress

- Capitol Switchboard 202-224-3121
- Ask for your Senator or Representative
- When connected, ask to speak to the staffer who handles your issue
 - More than likely, you will be put into voice mail; that's OK
- Keep it short –
 - State your name and where you live (shows you're a constituent)
 - Have notes in front of you highlighting the points you want to make
 - Say “thank you” and leave a phone number if there are questions

Making personal visits

- Call for an appointment two weeks prior, if possible
- Be prepared to fax a request stating the reason for the visit, who will be attending, etc.
- Be brief and focused ... in Washington, in the district or at the State Capitol, you will probably meet with a staffer and the meeting will probably last only 15-20 minutes
- Be prepared!
 - Arrive early for the appointment
 - Come with your talking points clearly defined
 - If in a group, one person should be the spokesperson; others identified to speak on certain topics
 - Leave handouts and contact information for follow-up
 - Say thank you!
 - Follow up

How to Find State Information



Unicameral Online

www.unicam.state.ne.us

What can you do on this site?

- Locate your Senator
- View the session calendar and daily agenda
- See Committee hearing schedules
- Research and track bills
- Contact your Senator
- Read reports
- Watch live coverage

State Committees

- Agriculture
- Appropriations
- Banking, Commerce and Insurance
- Business and Labor
- Education
- General Affairs
- Government, Military and Veterans' Affairs
- Urban Affairs
- Health and Human Services
- Judiciary
- Natural Resources
- Nebraska Retirement Systems
- Revenue
- Transportation and Telecommunications

Contacting State Senators

- **Phone**

- **Capitol Switch Board: (402) 471-2311**
- **Locate direct phone numbers through website:**
www.unicam.state.ne.us/senators/senators.htm

- **Mailing Address for Nebraska State Senators:**

The Honorable _____ [Fill in Senator's name]
District _____ [Fill in Senator's district number]
State Capitol
P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

Dear Senator _____ [Fill in Senator's name]

How to send an email to State Senators

- Nebraska Unicameral Website
www.unicam.state.ne.us
- Go to “Senators & Districts”
 - Click on “Senators”
 - Find your Senator (will have an email address listed)
 - click on “email”
 - type your message

What Can You Do?

- Create a Legislative District database for your organization
- Create a “Bills of Interest” list
- Track bills of interest
- Contact your Senator and voice your concerns
- Sign up for advocacy list serves

No Internet Access?

- Call your county Election Commission Office to locate your Senator
- Call the *Legislative Hotline* – (402) 471-2709 to learn about the status of a bill or resolution.
- Subscribe to the Unicameral Update (**free**)

Unicameral Information Office
Nebraska Legislature
P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68502

Closing Thoughts

- Be Informed
- Be Polite
- Be Diligent
- Send a Thank You Note



Basics of Congressional Communications

ABCs of Successful Advocacy

Be Accurate-strive for accuracy. Be ready to back up your position, be prepared to provide follow-up information if necessary. Know the arguments for and against your position, and be ready to counter opposition arguments accurately.

Be Brief-most opportunities you have to present your issue will be short. It is essential to keep your message basic and to stress the major points. Sometimes, this is the only opportunity you have to advance your issue and make an impression.

Be Credible-credibility is essential to being a successful advocate. Never mislead, and never exaggerate. Your reputation for credibility is essential in advancing your causes not only today, but especially in the future. Credibility is also essential in establishing yourself as a resource for information on your issues.

Meeting With Your Senator or Representative

Do not be discouraged if you end up meeting with a staffer-these individuals are often experts in their particular issues and areas and recommend courses of action to the Senator or Representative. Keep in mind that the purpose of your visit is not only to advocate, but to educate, and to initiate or further develop your relationship with that particular Senator or Representative and their office.

Tips:

- Schedule the appointment in advance.
- Make sure that you are prepared.
- Arrive early.
- Bring materials to leave behind.
- Prioritize Issues, discuss only one or two issues per visit.
- If more than one person is attending, roughly script who is going to say what and in what order. Choose a leader for each visit.
- Remember to be brief and to convey the main points of your argument.
- Personalize these points as much as possible. What you have seen, and how various proposals and policies affect you and those around you. Whenever possible, involve individuals from the Senator's or Representative's district.
- Be courteous. Never burn bridges.
- Remember to thank the elected official or staffer for meeting you.
- Offer your assistance.
- Follow up with a thank you note.
- Once you have a contact in a particular office, nurture that contact by remaining in touch. Effective advocacy is built upon relationships.

Writing Effective Letters/Emails

Due to increased security measures, faxing or emailing your letter to the Washington Office or your Senator and/or Representative or mailing it to their State Office is the quickest way to send your communication.

Addressing Correspondence

To a Senator

The Honorable (Full Name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator _____:

To a Representative

The Honorable (Full Name)
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative _____:

Tips:

- State who you are and way you are writing in the first paragraph. Letters from constituents and those representing constituents have far more effect on elected officials than letters from non-constituents.
- Keep it simple. Try to keep it to one page. Be brief and stick to your main point.
- Make it personal. The more personal the letter the more effective it will be. Put your arguments in your own words, as much as possible, while still relaying the major points.
- Keep it courteous. Say thank you and offer your assistance.
- End you letter with a specific request, i.e. oppose or support a specific bill.

Effective Telephone Calls

The number of the Capitol Switchboard for the Senate is 202-224-3121; for the House the number is 202-225-3121. Ask to be connected to the office of your Senator or Representative.

- Identify yourself and ask to speak to the staffer responsible for your issue.
- Briefly explain the reason for your call, and relay your specific request (vote for/against).
- Be courteous.
- Say thank you and offer your assistance.